



# News Release

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## **STATE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER ANNOUNCES THAT ALL CALIFORNIANS ARE NOW ELIGIBLE FOR FLU SHOTS**

SACRAMENTO - Encouraging Californians to get a flu shot now, State Public Health Officer Dr. Richard Joseph Jackson today announced that California has lifted previous restrictions on flu vaccine and all Californians are now eligible.

"While it is important to first vaccinate high-risk individuals, healthcare providers should take advantage of the opportunity to order more flu vaccine and vaccinate all who are interested," Jackson said. "It's not too late to get a flu shot. Flu season has not yet reached its peak in California and there is still plenty of time to get vaccinated and protect yourself from influenza."

The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) has been working with local health departments, healthcare providers and federal agencies to ensure that those who are in greatest need are able to receive flu vaccine. As a result of efforts to obtain more vaccine, more than 400,000 doses of adult vaccine and 265,000 doses of pediatric vaccine are available for health care providers to order.

"A limited supply of influenza vaccine early in the flu season prevented many individuals from obtaining a flu shot," Jackson said. "I encourage those individuals to contact their health care provider and inquire about getting a flu shot."

A Public Health Order issued by Jackson in October directed health care providers to reserve flu vaccine for seniors and other priority groups because of a nationwide shortage of the vaccine. In December, Jackson amended the order to include adults ages 50 and older, emergency service workers and those who have regular contact with persons at high risk for serious complications from the flu. The order was rescinded today.

CDHS is working with the California Medical Association and other organizations to relay the message that vaccine is ready to order.

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"It is extremely important for people to be vaccinated even at this time of the year because the flu season usually peaks in January through mid-March," said Dr. Ronald Bangasser, past president of the California Medical Association. "The opportunity to have vaccine available gives physicians the chance to reduce the risk of a bad flu season. It allows us to prevent sickness, hospitalization and complications that could lead to death among our most high-risk patients."

FluMist brand influenza vaccine is also available to healthy Californians ages 5 through 49 from local pharmacies and some healthcare providers. Consumers seeking to know which pharmacies are carrying FluMist may call 1-866-592-4381 from 5:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. After locating a pharmacy with FluMist, consumers should always phone first to ensure that FluMist is available and ask if an appointment is needed to obtain the vaccine.

In addition, Jackson encouraged all Californians to take the following steps to help prevent the spread of respiratory illnesses:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing. Properly dispose of used tissues.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water or a hand sanitizer to help protect yourself from germs and avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.
- Stay healthy by eating nutritious foods, drinking plenty of water, exercising, getting plenty of rest and not smoking.
- Stay home when you are sick to avoid infecting your co-workers and friends.

For more information about influenza and the influenza vaccine, please visit the CDHS Web site at <http://www.dhs.ca.gov/>.